



SIERRA CLUB

Connecticut Chapter
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Dear Senator Moore, Representative Luxenberg, and distinguished members of the Housing Committee,

On behalf of the Sierra Club and our more than 40,000 members and supporters in Connecticut, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

The Sierra Club is committed to defending everyone's right to a healthy world by tackling the serious challenges of a warming climate and unprecedented levels of pollution. A rapid and equitable transition to clean and renewable energy is our most powerful tool to address these issues. Connecticut must focus on critically needed strategies to cut greenhouse gas emissions from the most polluting sources - buildings, transportation and electricity generation. This means passing laws that require Connecticut to achieve clear and measurable steps towards a 100% renewable electricity sector, efficient and fossil free buildings, and zero-emission transportation.

The housing and energy crisis plaguing Connecticut residents, particularly low-income renters, is a tremendous challenge that must be addressed by the legislature. Senate Bill 4 is a comprehensive bill to do just that.

Sierra Club strongly supports SB 4, An Act Concerning Connecticut's Present and Future Housing Needs. We applaud the Committee for the many components of this bill that aim to address the serious housing and energy crisis that Connecticut residents are facing, especially tenants. The Sierra Club believes that this bill is good for people, public health, the environment and the climate. We support all the components of the bill including increased protections against rent inflation, a winter eviction moratorium, more affordable housing, lower rental application costs, a clear process for filing complaints, standard rental forms, and a pilot program to address housing for the homeless and veterans.

I will focus our testimony on Section 21, which will address energy costs in housing. Connecticut has one of the highest electricity rates in the nation. The impact of high rates is inequitable. The statewide average energy burden (household energy expenditures like electric, gas, heating fuel divided by annual household income) is 3%, while most of our cities experience rates of 6% or higher. Household energy burden that's higher than 6% is considered high and anything above 10% is considered severe.

Two recent studies have illustrated the impacts of high energy burden in Connecticut. The Trinity College Action Lab reported on the energy burden in Hartford's Upper Albany neighborhood where the average energy burden is 7.6% but can be as high as 27%. "Energy Justice and Health in a Changing Climate" by the Yale School of Public Health's Center on Climate Change and Health, the Vermont Law & Graduate School, and Operation Fuel also highlighted the impacts of energy burden.

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SkYROCKETING energy costs have exacerbated the problem of energy burden. Last year, the legislature increased the availability of energy assistance funds which is essential for struggling families. With this bill, the legislature will lower energy consumption and thus bills, year over year.

Low-income households, renters and homes with older appliances are more likely to experience higher energy burden. Households with high energy burdens often do not have the time or resources to invest in their home leading to unhealthy living conditions such as poor indoor air quality and unsafe indoor temperatures during extreme weather events.

Section 21 addresses this issue by creating a grant program for tenant-occupant, multi-family homes built before 1980 in low-income and Environmental Justice Communities to improve the energy efficiency of such residences, including, but not limited to, insulation, storm doors and windows, improved roofing, the installation of heat pumps, solar power generating systems, and to remediate health and safety concerns, such as mold, vermiculite, asbestos, lead and radon. The need is great, and the bill makes a significant investment of \$200 million a year for 5 years to help address this need.

To maximize the climate benefits of this proposal and ensure that residents most in need are served, we suggest the following for your consideration:

- Specify that grant program retrofits must be zero-emission, all-electric. To gain the greatest efficiency, emission reduction, and public health benefits, appliances and equipment replaced under this program should meet a zero-emission, all-electric standard. For example, if a hot water heater needs to be replaced it should be replaced with the most efficient all-electric hot water heater.
- Allow low-income owner occupants to be eligible.
- Some unit sizes have more access to fund than others, we recommend focusing on those that have the least access to funding.
- Protect tenants from rent increases related to building improvements under this grant program.

Thank you for your attention to these important issues and consideration of our testimony.

Sincerely,

Samantha Dynowski, State Director
Sierra Club Connecticut